

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 095167

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SUBJECT: INTSUM 304 - APRIL 27, 1977

1. LEBANON. SHELLING RESUMED IN SOUTHERN LEBANON LATE MONDAY NIGHT AND CONTINUED INTO TUESDAY. BEIRUT, HOWEVER, WAS CALM YESTERDAY AFTER THREE DAYS OF FIGHTING IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE CITY. PALESTINIAN SOURCES SAY THAT 80 PERSONS HAD BEEN KILLED. EMBASSY BEIRUT NOTES DAMAGE IN THE AREA IS EXTENSIVE, PARTICULARLY ALONG THE MAIN AXIS OF THE SYRIAN ADVANCE ON APRIL 24.

2. FATAH MILITARY POLICE ARE NOW PATROLLING THE AREA AND WARNING THE INHABITANTS THAT ANYONE SEEN WITH A WEAPON WILL BE SHOT. THE SYRIANS ARE ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO LEAVE AND ARE CONDUCTING A HOUSE-TO-HOUSE SEARCH FOR WEAPONS. EMBASSY BEIRUT OBSERVES THAT OVERT SYRIAN-FATAH COOPERATION IN THE STREETS OF BEIRUT IS
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A NEW PHENOMENON, WHICH PERHAPS REFLECTS THE STRENGTH OF THEIR ANTI-REJECTIONIST ALLIANCE.

3. THE PROBLEMS IN BEIRUT'S SOUTHERN AREA ARE NOT SETTLED. THE CHANCE FOR ADDITIONAL CLASHES IS GREAT SINCE SOME 4,000 SYRIAN TROOPS CONCENTRATED IN THIS SECTION OF THE CITY CONFRONT PERHAPS AS MANY AS 1,000

REJECTIONISTS AND LEFTISTS. (CONFIDENTIAL)

4. WEST BANK. VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS ERUPTED AGAIN IN NABLUS YESTERDAY AFTER RUMORS CIRCULATED THERE THAT RADICAL JEWISH LEADER RABBI KAHANE WOULD VISIT THE TOWN. ISRAELI SECURITY FORCES ARRESTED SEVERAL DEMONSTRATORS AND IMPOSED A CURFEW ON THE CITY. (UNCLASSIFIED)

5. ISRAEL. PERES, IN A SPEECH MONDAY, SAID THAT HE AGREED WITH PRESIDENT CARTER'S STATEMENT THAT IT IS POSSIBLE IN 1977 TO RESUME PEACE NEGOTIATIONS BUT THAT LONGSTANDING ARAB-ISRAELI DIFFERENCES WOULD BE A PROBLEM IN BRINGING THEM TO A SPEEDY CONCLUSION. PERES POINTED TO THREE REASONS FOR THIS:

--NO ARAB LEADER HAS YET SAID "UNCONDITIONALLY" THAT HE IS READY FOR "TRUE PEACE";

--ONLY ISRAEL IS PREPARED TO PAY THE PRICE OF PEACE AND MAKE TERRITORIAL COMPROMISES; AND

--THE ARAB WORLD "IS STILL BOUND TO...THE EXTREMIST LINE OF THE PLO AND ARAFAT".

6. THE ISRAELI DAILY MAARIV, EDITORIALIZED ON THE "ANXIETY" EVIDENCED AMONG ISRAELI LEADERS OVER US ATTITUDES ON PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. IT SAID THAT ISRAEL'S CONCERN AROSE FROM THE LACK OF PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS ON THE SADAT-PRESIDENT CARTER TALKS AND THE INABILITY
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OF THE ISRAELI EMBASSY HERE TO GET RELIABLE AND DETAILED REPORTS ON THOSE TALKS. THE PAPER ADDED -HAT THE "DISTINCT FEELING" IS THAT WASHINGTON HAS DELIBERATELY SURROUNDED ITSELF WITH A "WALL OF SILENCE".

7. THE USSR IS TRYING TO SUGGEST TO ISRAEL THAT IT WILL TAKE A MORE BALANCED APPROACH TO A SETTLEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST. SOVIET-ISRAELI CONTACTS THUS FAR DO NOT SUGGEST A POSSIBLE RENEWAL OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, BUT RATHER A SOVIET EFFORT TO IMPROVE ITS ROLE AS A POSSIBLE INTERMEDIARY IN THE AREA.

8. THE SOVIETS IN RECENT DAYS HAVE TAKEN TWO UNPRECEDENTED STEPS PRESUMABLY DESIGNED TO STIMULATE ISRAELI

HOPES THAT THE USSR WILL CHANGE ITS POSITION ON SENSITIVE ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUES. LATE LAST WEEK, SOVIET MILITARY OFFICERS ASSIGNED TO THE UN PEACEKEEPING FORCES IN EGYPT ENTERED ISRAEL TO VISIT UN OFFICES IN

JERUSALEM FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE SIX-DAY WAR. THE SOVIETS REFUSED AN OFFER TO MEET WITH ISRAELI COUNTERPARTS, BUT IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE VISIT COULD LEAD TO ADDITIONAL TRIPS BY SOVIET OFFICERS WHO ARE STATIONED IN EGYPT.

9. YESTERDAY, ACCORDING TO ISRAELI SOURCES, THE SOVIETS PROPOSED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMERCIAL TIES BETWEEN A MAJOR SOVIET EXPORT FIRM AND ISRAELI MERCHANTS. THE USSR HAS LONG BEEN INTERESTED IN CREATING LOW-LEVEL, UNOFFICIAL CONTACTS WITH ISRAEL THAT WOULD HAVE LITTLE REAL IMPACT ON THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE ARABS. THE ISRAELIS, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN LEERY OF ANY STEPS SHORT OF RESTORING FULL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS.

10. THESE INITIATIVES FOLLOW GENERAL SECRETARY BREZHNEV'S REMARKS ON THE MIDDLE EAST IN HIS SPEECH
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TO THE SOVIET TRADE UNION CONGRESS LAST MONTH. BREZHNEV DID NOT MENTION THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION AND DID NOT ATTACK ISRAEL. SOME ISRAELI OFFICIALS WERE PLEASED THAT BREZHNEV SPOKE ONLY OF "PRELIMINARY" SOVIET IDEAS THAT MOSCOW WAS "NOT IMPOSING ON ANYONE."

11. HIS REMARKS WERE CALCULATED TO SUGGEST THAT THE SOVIETS COULD PLAY A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN FUTURE MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT TALKS AND TO OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE TO PRESIDENT CARTER'S STATEMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE UN FOUR DAYS EARLIER.

12. EMBASSY MOSCOW NOTED AN IMMEDIATE BACKSLIDING BY THE SOVIETS ON THE ISSUE OF PLO ATTENDANCE AT GENEVA. WHILE THE SOVIET-SYRIAN COMMUNIQUE USED THE PHRASE "FROM THE OUTSET", A LATER APRIL 24 PRAVDA COMMENTARY OMITTED THIS PHRASE.

13. DESPITE THESE SIGNALS, THE SOVIETS DO NOT APPEAR TO BE READY TO WELCOME THE REOPENING OF AN ISRAELI EMBASSY IN THE USSR. VICTOR LOUIS, THE UNOFFICIAL SOVIET SPOKESMAN, HAS PRIVATELY OBSERVED THAT THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF CONTACTS OFFERS ADVANTAGES FOR BOTH SIDES. LOUIS SAID THAT AN ISRAELI PRESENCE IN MOSCOW WOULD BECOME A FOCAL POINT FOR DISSIDENTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS AND WOULD ASSUME A SPECIAL ROLE WITH REGARD TO SOVIET AND WORLD JEWRY. LOUIS STRESSED THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD REQUIRE STRONG GUARANTEES OF ACCEPTABLE ISRAELI BEHAVIOR.

14. THUS FAR, THE ISRAELIS HAVE SHOWN NO SIGN THAT THEY ARE PERSUADED THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE CHANGED THEIR PRO-ARAB POLICY. THE ISRAELIS PRESUMABLY BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT ANY CONTACTS WITH MOSCOW COULD COMPLICATE SOVIET-ARAB RELATIONS BY SPREADING DISTRUST AMONG THE ARABS OF
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THE DEGREE AND DURATION OF SOVIET SUPPORT. THESE APPROACHES WILL THEREFORE CONTINUE, BUT TEL AVIV WANTS MOSCOW TO EARN ITS WAY BACK INTO ISRAEL. (CONFIDENTIAL)

15. ME PEACE. THE EC-9 COUNTRIES APPEAR TO BE GIVING RENEWED CONSIDERATION TO AN "INITIATIVE" ON THE MIDDLE EAST. BRITISH SOURCES IN CAIRO WERE QUOTED AS SAYING THAT FOREIGN SECRETARY OWEN TOLD FAHMY DURING THEIR TALKS THIS WEEK THAT THE EC-9 WERE WILLING TO TAKE A "SEMI-INDEPENDENT" INITIATIVE. OWEN REPORTEDLY MADE THE POINT THAT THE TIME WAS NOT PROPITIOUS FOR SUCH A MOVE NOW, BUT IT MIGHT BE UNDERTAKEN IN THE AUTUMN.

16. THE INITIATIVE OWEN MENTIONED MAY REFER TO THE EC-9'S MIDDLE EAST DECLARATION, DRAFTED LAST JANUARY, WHICH CALLS FOR PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION IN NEGOTIATIONS. THE PROPOSED DECLARATION WAS SHELVED INDEFINITELY OWING TO BRITISH OBJECTIONS (ON OUR BEHALF) THAT IT WOULD NOT CONTRIBUTE TO THE PEACE PROCESS, GIVEN THE SECRETARY'S TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST AND THOSE OF WALDHEIM AND GENSCHER AT THAT TIME. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)
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